

architects share their views on issues that affect the industry

THE DOMAIN OF CREATIVITY- whose design is it anyway!



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A few weeks ago, the organizers of a National Conference of Architects & Interior Designers – scheduled in Mumbai – almost lured me into:

- a) making a presentation, on a topic of my choice (preferably, related to the field of architecture / design) and
- b) moderating a panel discussion, among a bunch of architects, on that subject.

It set me thinking, since not only did it mean that the area of discussion echoed with the sensibilities of the moderator, it also had to invite engaging inputs from reputed contemporaries in the field, to qualify as a convincing exercise.

Being spoilt for choice does not necessarily let you enjoy that space! Always. It's like an open-book exam and more often than not,



you realize you were better off with lesser choice.

As I dug deeper into the thought, the term 'Creativity' kept emerging, in one form or the other, I guess since it is the one binding factor among the illustrious design professionals and practices of a variety of streams and hues.

I had been introspecting on a spectrum of aspects of Creativity lately, for both personal and professional reasons. And so, the subject that finally emerged for the presentation and the panel discussion turned out to be :

The Domain of Creativity – Whose Design is it anyway!

My natural instinct veered towards exploring Creativity :

- a) by way of its definition – innovation, originality, inventiveness
- b) with its other attributes – intelligence having fun (Einstein's take on Creativity), among the deepest yearnings of the soul etc.
- c) and its complementing role in design / invention, along with the mother : necessity.

Examples in history of mankind being hunting tools for survival, drinking bowls, the wheel, for mobility and many more.

A quick look into these basic aspects done, I turned my focus to our collective business : 'Architecture'. As you read along, you may be able to spot the pun and the intent for 'mother of all arts' being termed as 'Business'. One of the basic necessities of man, housing, has always been a challenge. And it has historically been met, by our race, effectively and almost consistently. Be it :

- the cave dwellings in Cappadocia
- underground houses in Tungkwang

- the rainbow-like juxtaposed houses of Santorini
- blue clustered-houses of Jodhpur or
- the shuffled shanties of Dharavi in Mumbai.

It is an interesting fact to note, that none of the above required 'Architects' to be built. These were / are truly the designs emerging out of basic necessity. And so, I could safely term this collection as 'Architecture without Architects'.

And that brought me to a disturbing, yet very significant, thought in this process.

ABCD – Any Body Can Design

So. Can anybody design?

I threw this question to the panel and the audience, and the discussion that ensued was an eye-opener. While a few distinguished professionals seemed offended by the revelation, some were very accepting of the larger fact.

Since there are blurred lines and ways of design being approached, today, more than ever before, you are left wondering about the Architects'/ Designers' role in design. The internet, and technology / communication in general, is a tremendous educator and informant for all our needs today, including Design, of course.

Today we are faced with a challenging scenario, where the Client / User has access to tools such as websites like Houzz.com, Pinterest posts or if all fails, GOOGLE! And you could have tons of design ideas or solutions thrown at the Architect. And that ensures the tug-o-war between the two sides.

And so...Who Designs?

Who designs? In the end; during the process. Who is in the driver's seat?

This question when thrown open to the house, almost brought it down! Everyone had a take on this. And I can't see why not. Since, in some way or the other we all face this issue in our practice. And in our lives. The way we try to sell our designs and the way we build them. Or have them built.

I had done the thought-tickling, by now. I wanted to get the house into a reflective mode, to wrap this session. And so, the discussion in the final round was taken in the direction of 'The Integrity in Design' and 'the Easy vs the Right'.

Now, I had to collectively introspect and reflect upon this most significant aspect of design practice, with the best of design professionals of the country present in front of me, under that one roof.

And I went on to hammer the final nail(s)...

Given a situation where we as Architects are asked to drive the project, lead the way with a torch in our hands :

- How well do we do the assigned job?
- Do we do justice to the torch bearing?
- What are we lighting now?
- Do we like what we see when we look in the mirror?

I believe, as design professionals responsible for building for this society and the country in principle, we must look for answers to these questions. I also believe very strongly, that these answers lie within us. We only need to introspect and engage in some soul-searching to get there. if